

Fourth Sunday of Easter

John 10:11-18

The Bible clearly teaches that Jesus died one time as payment for the sins of all. That onetime payment was enough to make atonement for all the sinners of history. Yet, there is a yearning on my part to ask my Shepherd, “Lord, how often did your death save me from a wolf?” I think He will put His hand on my shoulder, smile quietly at me and say, “Day after day after day.”

That is not to say that God takes sin lightly. He does not, but He keeps me from succumbing to the temptations of the world, over and over again. I am weak, but He is the strength that keeps me from harm and from the wiles of Satan.

Jesus says in today’s passage that unlike a hired shepherd, He is our Owner, and will not be driven away from us. He will not flee from us, no matter what assails us. How can we know this? How can we know not to fear that He will leave us the next time we fail to follow His will? He has already proven it.

Just think of all the times that Jesus could have chosen to leave us. He chose to come to earth as a man, not to stay on His heavenly throne. He chose to give up part of His power in order to live as we live. When Satan confronted Him in the wilderness, Jesus chose to walk toward the cross, rather than bow to Satan’s temptations. Throughout His ministry, Jesus saw us for the unloving rebels that we really are, yet He continued to walk toward the cross. He wept over Jerusalem and her rebellious leaders, yet He entered the city. At Gethsemane, He pleaded with His Father, knowing exactly what awaited Him, but chose to walk toward the cross for us. As our fellow men pounded nails through His wrists and feet, He allowed it. He stayed on the cross and died, when He could have come down from the cross and demanded that we each pay in full for our sin. He allowed Himself to be separated from the Father and the Spirit as punishment for sin that He never committed.

Jesus has already shown us that He will never leave us. He is the Shepherd that loves the sheep beyond our comprehension. We can rest in His arms.

Let God’s Word bless you in a special way this Easter season.

(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

Fourth Sunday of Easter

John 10:11-18

1. What the difference between the care provided by the good shepherd and the care provided by the hired hand?
2. How many times is the “lays down his life” phrase used in this text? Why is the theme do dominant in these verses?
3. Who are some of the sheep that are “not of this sheep pen”? What is the desire of the good shepherd? How does the story in Luke 15:1-7 relate to this text?

For Family Reflection

4. Who are some of the “wolves” (vs. 12) who try to steal Jesus’ sheep today? In what way may these “wolves” be attacking you?
5. What does it mean for you that Jesus is your good shepherd?
6. Read Psalm 23. How does the psalm relate to this text?

Fifth Sunday of Easter

John 15:1-8

According to the New American Standard translation of this passage, Jesus uses the words “abide” or “abides” no less than seven times in just these eight verses. He implies it two more times. “Abide” isn’t a word that we use much in our daily lives. It means to “live in” or to “remain in,” as it says in the NIV Bible. It was obviously very important to Jesus in this instance.

How often do we think about living in or remaining in Jesus? How do many Christians define living in Jesus? It may mean going to church on Sunday morning, giving God an hour a week and then turning to more important things. Not that God isn’t important, but He is not in need of immediate attention. So many other urgent things demand attention that there just isn’t enough time in the day to dwell on God

Jesus refutes this attitude. He says that “...apart from Me you can do nothing.” If we walk away from Christ as we leave the church on Sunday morning, we walk away from the Source of our strength for all of life. We cannot “bear fruit” without remaining in Jesus.

St. Paul says that the fruit of the Spirit is more than good works. Bearing fruit is exhibiting “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control...” (Gal. 5:22-23) Who of us in God’s family doesn’t need such things? Which of us can honestly say that we have more urgent things to do than to remain in Jesus in order to be able to bear such fruit? Think of the good works, good relationships, good productivity, and good witnessing that would result from remaining in Jesus seven days a week. We need to pursue our Lord, who is already holding on to us, refusing to let us walk too far from His side.

We learn to abide in Jesus through God’s Word. Do you make time for it?
(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

Fifth Sunday of Easter

John 15:1-8

1. Why was the vine analogy a “picture” that Jesus’ audience would readily understand? (See Psalm 80:8-16, Isaiah 5:1-7, Jeremiah 2:21)
2. Why is our connection to the “vine” that is Jesus so crucial? What happens if we are connected to Him? What happens when we are not connected?
3. What does it mean to bear fruit? What are some of the fruits that you bear? What is the purpose of that fruit?
4. How does God “prune” us (vs. 2)? Why does God prune us?

For Family Reflection

5. Does verse 7 mean that God will always answer every prayer from everyone? Does God always answer our prayers in the ways that we wish?
6. “I am the vine” is one of several “I am” statements in John’s Gospel. Who is always the “I”? What are some of the other “I am” pictures? Which is your favorite?

Sixth Sunday of Easter

John 15:9-17

In last week's passage, Jesus talked about "abiding," or remaining, or living, in Him. This week, He says, "abide in My love." He says, "This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you." That command is almost as humbling as the words that our Lord taught us to pray, "...and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." Who can meet such a command? But, knowing that we cannot follow Jesus' command perfectly should not stop us from trying to understand God's definition of loving one another.

Jesus says that His disciples are no longer slaves, but His friends. Some people would almost call His version of friendship "slavery." That's because we don't understand friendship beyond the "I'll do something for you if you'll do something for me" concept. Jesus says that a friend will lay down his life for a friend. That is God's version of friendship.

Only Jesus can say to His friends, "You are My friends, if you do what I command you." He can say this because only He is the ultimate Friend. Anything that He would command us to do would be for our well being and our happiness. Even as we live in Him, we can't comprehend a friendship like that. Jesus is the Friend Who was willing to die for each one of us. St. Paul says, "...perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die" but that "while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Rom. 5:7-8)

Our encouragement from Jesus is that we did not have to be His friends before He became ours. He pursued us. He chose us, in spite of our sin. He cleansed us through the Cross and assured us through His Resurrection. This Friend says to us, "This I command you, that you love one another."

Learn more about what love is by studying God's Word daily.

(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

Sixth Sunday of Easter

John 15:9-17

1. What is Jesus' command to His followers? How did Jesus demonstrate what He commanded?
2. How does vs. 16 address the suggestion that we choose to follow Jesus? When did God choose you to be His child?
3. What the difference between a friend and a servant? What does it mean to be a friend of Jesus?

For Family Reflection

4. Read I John 3:16 and I John 4:7-7-12. How do these verses support John 15:13? What does it mean to love as Jesus loved us?
5. Is there joy in following Jesus? (vs. 11) How do we keep the joy of Easter going in our life, our home, and our church?
6. Read (and perhaps sing) "What a Friend We Have in Jesus." (LSB #770) Say a prayer thanking Jesus for choosing you to be His friend.

Seventh Sunday of Easter

John 17:11-19

Praying for the disciples, and us, Jesus said, “I do not ask You to take them out of the world...” Many people, and religions, think that the only hope that one has is to be taken out of this world. Jesus says that this is not His will for us.

Jesus prayed to His Father, “As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.” In Matthew 28, He commanded us to “...make disciples of all the nations...” That passage could be translated, “While you’re going...make disciples...” While we are out in the world, doing whatever it is that we do each day, our lives should be telling everyone that Jesus is our Savior and the Lord of the universe. We are left in the world so that our very presence will inspire others to seek God’s Kingdom.

We already belong to Christ. When He returns we will be taken to His side and remain with Him in His Kingdom forever. There are many millions, even in our own society, who will know terror and condemnation when He returns. We are called to be the lovers of these lost people. Jesus sends us out into our communities to invite strangers into God’s house; invite them out of a hopeless and sin-filled existence into a new life, free from condemnation and eternal death. We are still here because we are not the only ones whom Jesus loves and died for.

As we close this Easter season, remember that to many, many people around us, Easter is still chocolate bunnies and colored eggs. Jesus prayed to His Father for us, that we might have the courage and the love to tell the world that Easter is really about an empty tomb.

Are you part of a Bible study group? If not, please consider joining one.

(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

Seventh Sunday of Easter

John 17:11-19

1. Read John 17. What is Jesus doing in this chapter? Who is Jesus praying for in vs. 6-19?
2. Why does Jesus pray that the disciples be protected? What dangers would they face? What assurances did they have?
3. What was the disciples’ relationship with the world? Does the world still hate disciples of Jesus?

For Family Reflection

4. “Your word is _____.” What is the core truth of the Bible? (John 14:6) Is everything in the Bible true?
5. Does Jesus also send us into the world? (vs. 18) What message do we carry to the world? Will Jesus also protect us?
6. We have completed the Easter season. How has the Easter message blessed your life the last seven weeks? Why does the joy of Easter go beyond the seven weeks of a season?

The Day of Pentecost

John 15:26-27; 16:4-15

In this passage Jesus tells the disciples that the Holy Spirit will come into their lives. Later, after the Resurrection, He did just that.

Today we celebrate the day on which the Spirit made Himself known through a special indwelling of the apostles. The crowds were able to hear the news about Jesus in their own languages. Peter, the denier of Christ, preached a most extraordinary sermon. Stubborn unbelievers accused the apostles of being drunk. Thousands came into the kingdom of God in a single day. But, as awe inspiring as that day was, the Helper continues to work miracles just as magnificent in our own time.

Jesus called the Holy Spirit the “Spirit of truth.” Those things which we comprehend about God have been explained to us by Him, not by our own wisdom. He dwells within us throughout our lives, pointing us toward Jesus and inspiring us to be more like our Savior.

When there is a baptism during a worship service, do you ever find yourself wondering how much later the service might dismiss? If you do, don’t be particularly surprised. We get so used to having the Holy Spirit in our lives that we can sometimes forget the awesome gift that He bestows by His presence. Even an infant is graced by His presence.

We cannot do or think anything or be mature enough to make ourselves worthy of God’s desire to be such an intimate part of our lives. When each of us entered God’s kingdom, the Holy Spirit came to live within us to help, to grow, to inspire, to correct, to love, to heal each of us, His children. He keeps directing us toward the Savior to whom He brought us in the beginning.

The first Christian Pentecost was a thrilling event for all the believers who were present. Every baptism is also an outpouring and indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the beginning of a life filled with the power and love of God.

Let God’s Word bless you in a special way this Pentecost season.

(A message from your Iowa District West Christian Education Committee)

The Day of Pentecost

John 15:26-27; 16:4-15

1. How many days after Easter does Pentecost take place? What other significant event happened ten days before Pentecost? What’s the significance of God’s timing of these events?
2. What names for the Holy Spirit do we find in these texts? What is the significance of these names?
3. What would be the role of the Holy Spirit according to vs. 8-11?

For Family Reflection

4. Review the Pentecost story from Acts, chapter 2. What happened on the Day of Pentecost? How were the disciples changed? How as the church changed? How was the world changed?
5. Review the Small Catechism explanation to the Third Article of the Apostles’ Creed. What does it mean to believe in the Holy Spirit? What blessings does the Spirit bring to your life?
6. How is Pentecost observed in the church today? What signs and symbols of the Spirit do you see in your church? What liturgical color is associated with Pentecost?